

LOCAL DEVELOPMENT IN INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION: ISSUES, APPROACHES AND PERSPECTIVES FOR A TERRITORIALISATION OF DEVELOPMENT POLICIES

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INTRODUCTION

The session aimed at investigating the relationship between cooperation and local development practices in the Global South. Theoretically as well as at the level of development cooperation policies and strategies, a reconfiguration of the reference scales at which the very idea of development is conceptualized has been taking place since the Seventies. The context is that of the process of reorganization of the international politico-economic system that began in those years, which also encouraged the social sciences to adopt new perspectives in analyzing and interpreting social phenomena and economic processes. Alongside the essentially aspatial and macroeconomic approaches which remain dominant to this day, an attention to the local dimensions of development has gradually gained ground, moving from somewhat subterranean beginnings to its current prominence [1]. This reconfiguration is very much part of the considerations that have matured since the early Eighties regarding the crisis that swept through the field of development studies and the post-impasse debate that has enlivened the subsequent decades. In this context, local development has steadily become more and more central to development policies, starting with a number of Northern countries in the Eighties, and explicitly emerging in the developing countries since the second half of the Nineties.

Local development's rise to prominence in the South raises a number of questions that the contributors have tried to address in the session. Are we dealing here with yet another transfer of development "technologies" - technologies that are basically theoretical and operating approaches - from North to South? And how appropriate are these technologies? Can we speak of a "discovery of local development" in Developing Countries (DCs), or is what we are seeing more of a top-down approach, where the impetus descends through the long networks of international development, with the latter's own rhetoric and priorities? How does the attention to local development in DCs link up with the debate surrounding endogenous development, the informal economy and the activism of civil society on the one hand, and the processes of political and administrative decentralization on the other? And, above all, where does local development stand in a context that would appear to be dominated by the processes of globalization and deterritorialization? One of the hypotheses underlying this investigation is that the growing international stress given to local development must be interpreted from a multi- and trans-scalar standpoint, through an approach capable of encompassing local dynamics, national cultural and politico-social contexts, and processes that operate on the supranational and global scales. In this perspective, dealing with local development means considering a complex sequence of global-local interactions, between economic trends and processes of redefining political space, between local discoveries in the framework of global conditions, conceptualizing them through multiple decontextualizations and subsequent reconceptualization practices at different scales and in different contexts.

In the next section we will outline the fortune of local development in the DC, highlighting both the (global) context where local development emerged in the Nineties and the inner tension between top-down and bottom-up approached in development theories.

LOCAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE ECONOMIES OF THE DCs

The global context of local development in DCs

With a certain delay with respect to the North's debate concerning local development theory and practice, the latter concept began to appear in the policies of the developing world during the Nineties [2] [3]. At this point, it was closely connected with the shifting strategies for international cooperation in its various forms (bilateral, decentralized, nongovernmental), both in Eastern Europe - those portions affected by the UE's expansion in particular [4] - and in many developing countries in Africa, Latin America and Asia. A glance at the list of the programs and projects spearheaded by the organizations involved in international cooperation (the World Bank, various United Nations agencies such as UNIDO, the ILO, FENU and the European Union itself) [5], is sufficient to provide an idea of how local development has become one of the buzzwords of international cooperation in the last decade.

This espousal of local development and all its trappings by the major supranational organizations is something of a watershed in our view, as it was in some respects the seed and source of the ambiguities that have beset local development initiatives in developing countries. While in the literature discussed in these pages, local development

proceeds from the solid empirical evidence provided by observed economic trends - often openly at odds with the orthodox narratives of economic development - the interpretation that the international organizations proffer is heavily influenced by the ideological/normative context in which these institutions live. The break between the concerns of local development - like those of participation and gender differences - and the neo laissez-faire orthodoxy of groups such as the World Bank - is, in fact, more apparent than real. As we will see above all in the case of Egypt, heterodox theories are often introduced in the mainstream - intellectual and operative - of these supranational actors as a means of highlighting the need to revamp the relationship between the State and the market. If it is true that abandoning the rigid monetarist orthodoxy goes hand in hand with acknowledging the regulatory role of the State, it is equally true that most of the criticisms target the State's disorganization, and the bureaucracy that amplify rather than restrain the markets' flaws.

In particular, in order to clarify the context from which this investigation springs, it is advisable to dwell for a moment on the fact that the neo laissez-faire approach taken in the strategies of the major exponents of development cooperation was virtually the only alternative to the development crisis and the debate it fueled, so much so, indeed, that the international literature refers to it as a mainstream approach. Starting from the early Eighties, with the so-called Washington Consensus, this approach found adherents in the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, spreading thence to permeate the thinking and policy-making of many development agencies, including those of the United Nations, other international bodies and a large proportion of national governments worldwide.

In the early Nineties, following the failure of the Structural Adjustment Programs, development cooperation policies were heavily impacted by the change of course embodied in the Post-Washington Consensus, which was explicitly influenced by the neo-institutional approach. In this connection, it is now widely acknowledged that the local scale's new role in development cooperation policies and strategies resulted from the considerations triggered in the second half of the Seventies by the attempt to create a view of development that could constitute an alternative to the aspatial approaches of the macroeconomic school, as well as from the influence that the New Institutional Economics [6] exerted on the work of the major players in development cooperation. This approach is based in identifying, at the national, subnational and local scales, those institutions that are not directly linked to the market as actors capable of correcting the market's shortcomings.

In the developing countries, following the new rules of the internationalized economy - mostly through the channels of development cooperation - has hinged on two sets of factors, one politico-economic, and the other more purely political, which refer explicitly to good governance. In this context, development cooperation has gradually incorporated local development policies as the preferred tool for combining initiatives that are intended to influence the economic as well as the political spheres by promoting processes of divestiture and decentralization, often seen as the necessary accompaniment to local development policies. There can be little doubt that the link between the new role of the local in development cooperation strategies and the gradual enlargement of the very goals of development, which in some cases extend so far as to include the political dimension by making development aid conditional upon introducing democratization processes, is emblematic of the relationship between the political and economic perspectives of local development. This overlap not only demonstrates how a focus on participatory democracy, local governance and decentralization has accompanied local development thinking in the DCs, but has also contributed to unmasking the inadequacy of approaches, concepts and models that are explicitly tied to the Western world's specific historic and cultural patterns. Here, as the controversy sparked by what has been termed the right-based approach has made clear, the legitimacy of efforts to export and impose (through military intervention in some cases) models and processes of forced democratization is very much a moot point. The criticisms inspired by these processes of standardization have been similarly skeptical of the work of the supranational political bodies that have taken it upon themselves to develop and spread a sort of "global policy" based on the universality of democratic principles.

Local development in the DCs: between top-down and bottom-up approaches

If we analyze local development in the DCs, as least as far as Senegal, the rest of French-speaking Africa [7] and Egypt are concerned, we find that two opposing visions have been at work. The first sees local development as a highly institutionalized process, marching in lock-step with political and administrative decentralization. However much it can mobilize local society through inclusive processes, it still moves from the center downwards. Local development is generally presented as the one essential means of stimulating local agencies, and hence local society, to formulate and deploy strategies for their own areas' infrastructures, economy and welfare [8] [9]. By contrast, the other vision of local development puts greater emphasis on the community, or on relatively endogenous - and possibly even marginal - dynamics, some seen as residual, others as innovative.

In recent years, many countries in the Southern reaches of the world have discovered endogenous local dynamics that were either unpredicted or cannot be seen as issuing strictly from development aid; at the same time, they have also changed their approach to development cooperation, passing from exogenous, top-down processes, to self-reliant, bottom-up approaches that have largely been put forward by groups who are in the minority as regards their ability to wield power, like many of the NGOs in the North and an increasing number of Southern NGOs. Among the unforeseen changes, we can include a variety of interesting social movements that have taken place in different parts of the South [10]. These organized initiatives have striven to re-conquer and regenerate their own "local space", and have been successful in rising above the merely local and banding together in quite complex organizations involving as many as

half a million people and more, as has been the case of certain initiatives in Mexico or West Africa. It should be noted that many of the efforts are far from being antagonistic to development cooperation, and indeed have prospered thanks to their ability to attract and manage sizeable amounts of international aid. At the same time, they have been able to garner grass-roots support among small farmers and villagers, while striking a balance between tradition and modernity. As a result, these initiatives bask in the floodlights of international cooperation, and many aid agencies and NGOs rely on their dynamism as the fulcrum of their intervention strategies.

As part of this change of approach, there is a growing critical awareness of the meaning and role of an aid agency, of the importance of the actors involved, of local values, the crucial need to strengthen and support the local area's capacity for self-organization, and of the social, relational and environmental dimensions of a type of development that cannot be rooted only in an economic sphere that has nothing to do with the social [11]. In making way for an approach stemming from an idea of community-based, self-reliant and bottom-up development, the world of cooperation has also fitted itself out with a whole series of tools for analyzing the territorial, social and cultural context that leverage participation and the need to understand the local viewpoint, as exemplified by the various approaches that fall under the heading of "participatory diagnostics" (MARP, RRA, etc.) [12]. As mentioned earlier, this change in outlook would appear to have spread to the major international bodies, rather than being restricted to the more bottom-up actors such as the NGOs.

The distinction between an institutional top-down vision and a "community-based", bottom-up vision of local development also hinges on the conceptual view of the territory in which the trends triggered by local development processes operate, where on the one hand we have a received territory, which precedes the process and is generally a politico-administrative division of space, and, on the other hand, a constructed territory, the "project" territory. As the territory is the result of a process of construction on the part of the actors, not defined beforehand but recognized a posteriori, the territory of local development is not something that exists everywhere: often, in fact, we find that we are dealing with spaces dominated by the exogenous laws of localization, which are not identified as territories. The two conceptual views must not be confused, but must both be taken into account in the local development discourse. Territory then can be defined as the 'container' and the result of a process of elaborating content [2: 299].

Situating the contributions

Within the contributions presented at the session, we can identify at least two main themes. The first one is the relationship between territories in sharing and establishing different, yet related, patterns, of Local Economic Development (LED). The second stream is related to the interaction between LED and social structures, with specific reference to LED as an interface between different source of power and legitimacy and between different scales of decision and implementation. As the first theme is concerned, the first two papers in this sub-section make reference to project between Italian authorities and national and local administration in the Sahel area (Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger and Senegal). In their intervention, Egidio Dansero and Agnese Migliardi outline a critical assessment of the Italia-Sahel programme, with special reference to the "Fondo Italia-CILSS di lotta contro la desertificazione e per la riduzione della povertà nel Sahel" (ITALY-CILSS FUND, ICF), established in 2002 and active until 2011. ICF is a very interesting case-study that shows from one side the attempt to adopt a spatial and territorial approach to development cooperation, with analysis and actions interlinking different political and action scales, and from the other side a technocratic development machine that failed in try to put together the different actors of development cooperation but at the some time has been quite effective in local initiatives.

The two other contributions dealing with the Italian Development Cooperation's practices take into account a more specific issue, that is to say the role of decentralized cooperation and the possibility of technology and practices transfer. The paper presented by Maurizio Tiepolo and Mario Artuso is the report of a decentralized cooperation between the Politecnico of Turin and Niger and Senegal. The establishment of a multipurpose and open access GIS in the public administration of three minor cities has highlighted the potential of codified geographical knowledge in order to make effective the control of local authorities over their territory in order to facilitate and secure Local Economic Development processes. The presentation of the group led by Giulio Mondini and Sergio Olivero addresses a totally different issue that is the social and territorial impact of the RENEP (Renewable Energy for Palestine). What is at stake, here, is the fundamental issue of transfer of models (in this case the smart city framework) and technologies (renewable energies, with special reference to solar production) from their original Northern context to the Global South (in this case to a context, the Palestinian one, which is characterized by an unusual degree of conflict). The case study provides evidence for the positive impact of such transfers on LED, creating opportunities for employment and empowerment, above all among the youngest generation. The second group of papers deals with the interaction between LED and social structures, with special reference to the puzzle of different sources of legitimacy and (political, social, economic) power in Africa and Brazil. Sara Belotti's case studies on sustainable tourism in Mozambique, with reference to the specific case of Zinave National Park (PNZ) highlights the complex relationship between "traditional" and "legitimate" structures and hierarchies and the superimposing administrative "legal" authorities. In particular, using GIS, the author demonstrates that the dynamic interaction between legitimate and legal sources of authority is projected into a territorialization which is evolving over time, mirroring the emerging power architecture. As a consequence spatial hierarchies are unceasingly reworked and redesigned in order to match power dynamics. Such a view is also confirmed by Roberto Di Meglio on Local Economic Development and social economy in the context of the ILO (International

Labour Organization) policies apt to secure decent work, fair income and participation into the development processes. In particular, the brief case study concerning the Ghana Decent Work Programme (GDWP) shows the importance of the dialogues between “local norms and values” – as embodied in traditional sources of power and legitimacy – and local government authorities and agencies. Once again, the interaction of different power architectures enact Local Economic Development processes and entails spatial transformation (in the Ghanaian case the multiplication, integration and up-scaling of LED projects at different scales and in different regional contexts). A similar standpoint arises from Francesco Biciato’s account on the ART (Articulation of Territorial Networks for Sustainable Human Development) framework of the UNDP, where the role of local communities is twofold: on the one hand, they support decentralization and local governance; on the other hand they can get involved in South-South decentralized cooperation, facilitating the exchange and integration of LED practices. From a different perspective Carla Inguaggiato observes the interaction between producers’ cooperatives and social structure in the case of Northeast Brazil. It is interesting to read the Latin-American case study in comparison with the African ones. Inguaggiato, in fact, takes into account three villages created by the agrarian reform (assentamentos) between 1997 and 2005. As such these settlements cannot be considered as bearer of traditional forms of legitimacy. On the contrary, they rather are the outcome of a policy dropped from central and local political authority. The assentamentos policy actually denotes a “third culture” between traditional indigenous settlements and State-sponsored massive colonization and intensive exploitation. Using the methodology of network analysis, the author shows that different social structures (arising from kinship ties, previous working experiences, political and/or religious background, and technical knowledge) do play a role in differentiating the Local Economic Development processes enacted by different villages. Of course it is not about “traditional” architecture of knowledge and power, yet it shows the transformative capability of different territorialization patterns to adjust and adapt LED. Massimo Pallottino’s theoretical reflections show some “family resemblance” with Inguaggiato’s standpoint, apart from the common geographical focus on Brazil. In particular, Pallottino emphasizes the continuity between theory and practices in Local Economic Development processes: as a consequence, the internal stratification of the local communities (that is, ties and relations among the social actors) becomes a pivotal element driving the success and the failures of LED projects.

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